

## **AER grand total are astounding**

**by Rachel Newton**

Back in April, Army Emergency Relief (AER) donations were literally flooding the Army Community Service office at Pine Bluff Arsenal. Now, all the donations are in, and the grand total numbers are staggering.

"The official campaign ran from March 11 through May 30, but that isn't the most exciting thing," said Jerry Pye, ACS director.

Official grand totals show that through a combination of donations from active duty military, civilians and retired military/civilian approximately \$34,000 was received.

"These results are amazing," said Pye, emphasizing the fact that AER headquarters' mass-mailing to retirees in Arkansas and surrounding states was the biggest factor. "There database is astounding and the dollars are astounding. This is 10 times more than we have ever collected in my memory."

In an article about AER in the April *Arsenal Sentinel*, Pye said that a few years ago PBA experience what they considered a banner year. "However, we were only sending out AER notices to people within our own database – which included people on PBA, retirees, and others in the state of Arkansas. A very limited but sizable database – so we thought," he said.

This year, Pye said that since AER headquarters contacted each campaign manager and expressed interest in sending letters out to retirees and civilians in each geographical area surrounding the installations, that is why he believes the contributions rolled in like they did. "We received contributions from people in Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, and Louisiana," he said. "My guess is that some of the people who gave have never given before or have seen examples of how AER can help."

The combination of that good database coupled with the fact that PBA is the only active duty installation in the state of Arkansas were all contributing factor, said Pye. "We are the only campaign in Arkansas for AER and we are a centrally located place," he said. "We captured a lot of dollars that historically we have missed."

Another thing people don't realize is this program is basically veterans helping veterans, said Pye. "This is not a government organization it is a veteran's organization," he said. "Each person in their own way gives. The other thing that I think plays a major part in it is the patriotic attitudes of the people in the local areas. It is my personal conviction that people in the South are more giving and more sympathetic to the military especially since we are the only active duty installation in the state."

The PBA ACS office is responsible for AER. Pye is the AER campaign manager and Jan Brewer is the AER officer. "The money that was collected has been sent to AER headquarters in Washington, D.C.," said Brewer. "This money is collected by Army installations worldwide and is available to any Soldier who needs assistance."

Pye added that PBA ACS has given assistance via AER to several Soldiers and their families in this area as well as those just passing through. "Probably a good percentage of the Soldiers we assisted were those who were TDY (temporary duty station), passing through or in an emergency situation. We have given a substantial amount of aid to those folks," he said. "We have fixed everything from cars to air conditioners."

AER is a private nonprofit organization incorporated in 1942 by the Secretary of War and the Army Chief of Staff. It is in its 65<sup>th</sup> year of operation. Its mission is to provide emergency financial assistance to active duty Soldiers, single or married, and their dependents. National Guard, Reserve Soldiers and their dependents; Soldiers retired from active duty for longevity or physical disability, and their dependents; ARNG and USAR Soldiers who retired at age 60, and their dependents; and surviving spouses and orphans of Soldiers who died while on active duty or after they retired are also eligible for AER benefits.

AER emergency financial assistance is available wherever a Soldier may be. Primary outlets are the approximately 98 AER Sections at Army installations worldwide.

Source of funds to sustain AER financial assistance are loan repayments; annual fund campaign; unsolicited contributions and investment income. AER assistance may be obtained locally from the PBA ACS office or through more than 1,800 locations around the world including any Red Cross chapter, any Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society Auxiliary, any Air Force Aid Society Section, or any Coast Guard Mutual Assistance office.

Eighty-eight cents of every dollar contributed goes to helping Soldiers, according to an AER brochure. Administrative cost and fund raising expenses are only 12 cents. Since it was established in 1942, AER has helped more than three million Soldiers and Family members with more than \$992 million. In 2006, AER assisted 50,000 Army people with more than \$49 million.